

Intelligence Report

DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force

28 September 1995



The "Yugoslav" Army: Flawed But No Paper Tiger

Summary



The "Yugoslav" Army (VJ) has not intervened in Bosnia or Croatia primarily because Serbian President Milosevic believes it is not in Belgrade's interest to renew overt "Yugoslav" military involvement in these areas. Despite significant shortcomings, however, the VJ remains capable of moving substantial forces into both Bosnia and Croatia and sustaining them in combat operations if so ordered. The Croatian Army (HV) and the VJ are almost evenly matched, and the victor in any given confrontation would depend heavily on the particular circumstances, including level of troop commitment, degree of mobilization, and distance from logistics support. For example, the VJ can mass forces equivalent or more numerous than the Croatians in some areas, most easily Sector East and northern Bosnia. These areas are close to the Serbian border and to the strongest VJ units and logistics bases. The VJ would have much more difficulty achieving a superiority of forces deeper into Bosnia, or even along the Montenegrin border opposite Dubrovnik.



Political Decision Lacking

Serbian President Milosevic's decision to place sanctions relief and achievement of a negotiated settlement before protection of Serb-controlled territory in Croatia and Bosnia has been the driving force behind non-intervention. Milosevic could be forced to intervene in Bosnia if nationalists bolstered by an influx of Serb refugees began to pose a threat to his regime. At this point, it is not even clear that Belgrade would intervene to defend Krajina Serb-held Sector East if the Croatians attack.

Milosevic's overriding objective remains the lifting of sanctions on Serbia. Unless provoked into taking military action in Sector East, Milosevic intends to do nothing to jeopardize the prospects of sanctions relief, and will maintain his current measured response to events in the region.

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- Most VJ officers are sympathetic to the plight of the Bosnian and Krajina Serbs, but do not want to embroil the VJ in fighting in Bosnia or Croatia, according to a variety of reports. Nevertheless, many VJ officers feel that "Yugoslavia" has an obligation to overtly assist the Bosnian and Krajina Serbs in the event that they are faced with a catastrophic defeat. []

VJ Strengths

Professionalism. The VJ inherited much of the pre-war Yugoslav People's Army's (JNA) professional manpower and, despite a major reorganization, the army continues to reflect many of the JNA's attributes. Accordingly, the JNA had a solid core of competent personnel-- especially in its armor, artillery, and technical units-- although it never had a flashy reputation. The pre-war JNA planned to fight using its conventional force for delaying actions, then move to partisan warfare using mobilized reserve forces after its regular units were defeated. The JNA never modernized much of its combat doctrine, concentrating on slow, methodical offensive operations and strong positional defenses heavily supported by substantial firepower. This doctrine was reflected in JNA operations in Croatia--especially in Sector East during 1991--and in Bosnian Serb Army operations over the past three years.

- Since 1991, the cohesion and efficiency of the VJ's officer and NCO corps probably have improved with the departure of nearly all non-Serbian personnel and removal of excess senior officers and other ex-Communist baggage. Prior to 1991, the JNA officer corps was a tight-knit group within Yugoslav society, something that probably has remained true over the past four years.
- Most reports that describe VJ shortcomings are coming from VJ officers, indicating that the VJ has identified and analyzed its problems and is taking them into account when planning for future operations. []

Equipment. The VJ is still the best-equipped force in the former Yugoslavia, and its equipment advantages probably would give the VJ a battlefield edge in some regions, especially areas like eastern Slavonia where the VJ can commit and sustain substantial forces.

This memorandum was prepared by [] Office Of DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force.
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- The "Yugoslav" Army is equipped with 2,000 to 3,000 tanks and other armored vehicles and at least 2,000 to 3,100 artillery pieces and heavy mortars greater than 100mm. In contrast, the Croatian Army (HV) has 300 to 350 tanks and about 1,000 artillery pieces and heavy mortars.
- The "Yugoslav" Air Force also holds a substantial advantage over the Croatian Air Force. Belgrade has more than 240 combat aircraft in its inventory, compared with some 60 combat aircraft in the Croatian inventory.

Logistics. The VJ has a well-defined logistics structure with specialized logistics units at all echelons of the army. The VJ also still has large quantities of weapons, ammunition, and fuel available from the stockpiles of the former Yugoslavia to draw from, and should be able to support most operations using established road and rail links. The VJ, however, is not organized to support large forces at long distances from their home garrisons.

- In response to recent Croatian threats against the Krajina Serbs in UN Sector East, the VJ has undertaken its largest deployment of forces since the VJ returned to its garrisons in 1992 after the war with Croatia. The VJ has been able to maintain this force near the border for more than a month.
- With its logistics infrastructure, the VJ probably can continue to supply its forces on the border--or forces staged into the nearby Posavina corridor in Bosnia. In addition, the VJ probably could sustain a smaller force of two to three combat brigades around Banja Luka indefinitely.

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The VJ's deployment to the border with Croatia near Sector East provides evidence of the army's continued ability to stage effective deployments in some areas. The deployment was carried out in less than a month and appears to have been well-planned and well-organized.

- Even after three years of sanctions and no major deployments since 1991, the VJ was able to move 20,000 to 35,000 troops, some 200 tanks, 150 APCs, and 130 artillery pieces greater than 100mm--including forces from as far away as southern Serbia--to the Croatian border in less than a month.
- The VJ carried out the movement professionally, shifting major parts of two mechanized corps--organized into two echelons--to key crossing points. These forces were backed by a substantial number of special operations, antiaircraft, engineer, logistics, and helicopter units.
- Overall, the army's discipline and organization appear stronger than in 1991. For example, the VJ has demonstrated its continued proficiency in camouflaging its vehicles and maintaining substantial amounts of equipment in the field, according to various sources.

Weaknesses

Impact of Low Funding/Economic Problems. Milosevic has starved the VJ over the past four years, slashing funding to bolster spending on the Serbian Interior Ministry, which Milosevic regards as his regime's guarantor.

- Inadequate funding has forced the VJ to cut back on some training, salaries, and support to units in the field, eroding the Army's capabilities and creating severe morale problems.

many experienced officers and NCOs are leaving the VJ--citing excessive field duty, low pay, and poor living standards--and even some elite units are complaining about the lack of experience in junior officers and NCOs.

- The current crisis further reduces the motivation of talented personnel to join or continue service in the VJ.

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- Inadequate funding levels have also reduced unit training levels. Live-fire training has fallen below Western standards and most training is concentrated at the battalion level or below, with few exercises conducted by entire brigades. [redacted]

Morale. Low morale appears to have struck the VJ at all levels, from the most senior officers to soldiers in the field, primarily as a result of recent Serb defeats in the Krajina and Bosnia, as well as a difficult domestic economic situation.

- [redacted] the Krajina Serb defeat severely damaged VJ morale, [redacted] Despite the widely-held belief that the defeat was a political sell-out, rather than a military debacle, much of the finger-pointing reportedly has focused on questioning the competence of VJ officers assigned to the Krajina [redacted]

Reserves

The VJ, which relies heavily on reservists to supplement its professional cadre of soldiers, has been hit hard by major problems in the reserve callup system,

[redacted] Activation notices reportedly are commonly ignored and attempts by Yugoslav police to forcibly round up reservists have met with mixed success. The reserve problems reportedly were a critical part of the decision not to reinforce the Krajina prior to the Croatian offensive.

- [redacted] the Novi Sad Corps--responsible for the border opposite Sector East--has been unable to mobilize many of its personnel because some reservists hid in remote villages or left Serbia to avoid conscription [redacted]
[redacted] the pool of reservists is further limited because commanders do not trust non-Serb draftees--many of which are concentrated in the Vojvodina, near Novi Sad--believing they would not participate in combat operations.
- Partly in response to the mobilization problems, the VJ on 21 September extended by 30 days the military service of all conscripts whose 12-month service was scheduled to end in September, according to press reports. [redacted] some enlistments could be extended by as many as three additional months.
- [redacted]
[redacted] no indications that the VJ has been unable to deploy units to the border of Sector East because of a lack of reservists. BSA units-

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-organized along JNA lines--have operated for most of the Bosnian war at 30 to 50 percent of their authorized levels. Moreover, like the VJ, a variety of sources have claimed since 1992 that the BSA has had poor morale. Nevertheless, the BSA has continued to perform well in many combat operations and has bounced back from serious defeats, as occurred recently in western Bosnia. []

Likely Outcome of an HV-VJ Confrontation

Only the early dispatch of VJ forces to head off a Croatian advance is likely to prevent the battle-tested HV from capturing Sector East. In Bosnia, a similar rapid VJ deployment would be needed to halt a full-scale Croat-Bosnian offensive on Banja Luka.

- The HV probably can seize UN Sector East from local Krajina Serb forces. If the HV launches a quick-moving attack occupying Sector East--including destruction of bridges over the Danube--VJ attempts to intervene would be hamstrung. The VJ probably would be unable to reverse Croatian gains unless Belgrade is prepared to commit substantial additional forces and accept high casualties.
- The BSA eventually was able to blunt the recent Croat-Bosnian offensive in western Bosnia without substantial VJ assistance. It put up a more spirited and coordinated resistance as the offensive neared Banja Luka and was helped by the Croatian decision to curtail HV operations. Fewer VJ forces probably would be needed to halt an HV advance than in Sector East, but VJ forces would still have to be deployed rapidly to influence the battle. []

Contrasts in Doctrine. The HV has a combat doctrine that is superior to the VJ's and has a solid core of elite combat forces to implement the doctrine. The HV doctrine--introduced in 1993--features rapid penetration of enemy defenses by elite forces and steps to bypass major areas of resistance to reach key campaign objectives deep in the enemy's rear area.

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- In contrast, the VJ and its protege, the BSA, have traditionally conducted their campaigns and employed their tactical units more methodically, both offensively and defensively. The VJ's ability to counter an HV offensive depends heavily on the rapid movement or positioning of VJ forces in a combat zone. Such deployments are necessary to give the VJ adequate time to prepare a positional defense that would be difficult for the HV to penetrate.

Contrasts in Morale. The HV almost certainly has higher morale than the VJ. The HV has treated its Krajina campaign and subsequent operations in Bosnia almost as a crusade; any operation to retake Sector East and Vukovar--Croatia's Alamo--would only increase motivation.

- Most VJ units would suffer from poor morale in a campaign against the HV unless VJ officers were able to convince their troops that they were defending "Yugoslavia" proper. Serbian and Montenegrin conscripts and reservists--who make up the bulk of VJ units--are largely unmotivated to fight hard for Bosnian or Krajina Serb territory. Low morale would be mitigated somewhat by a VJ move to occupy and defend areas in Bosnia and Croatia. Conducting territorial defense would help VJ officers motivate their forces--and be less costly--allowing troops to remain in relatively static positions and fire on an advancing adversary rather than requiring them to take the offensive.

VJ Equipment and Firepower. The VJ's stronger armored forces, greater firepower, and potentially greater manpower levels probably would allow the VJ to offset HV superiority in other categories as long as the VJ deploys in such a way as to maximize its advantages.

- Many of the HV's victories over the BSA have occurred because the HV has been able to mass adequate troops and equipment, overwhelming BSA forces no matter how hard they fight.
- Unlike the BSA, the VJ can mass forces equivalent or more numerous than the Croatians in some areas, most easily Sector East and northern Bosnia. These areas are close to the Serbian border and to the strongest VJ units and logistics bases. The VJ would have much more difficulty achieving a superiority of forces deeper into Bosnia, or even along the Montenegrin border opposite Dubrovnik.

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